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The Character of Christ as the Witness to the Truth;

CONSIDERED AND APPLIED IN

A S E R M O N, <sup>Oct. 21:</sup>

Preached at CREDITON, Sept. 6th, 1792, <sup>from the author.</sup>

To the SOCIETY of

UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS,

Established in the WEST of ENGLAND.

BY JOSHUA TOULMIN, M.A. K

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*Published at the unanimous Request of the Society.*

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To which are added,

Some Thoughts on the true Construction of  
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The Church of Christ as the Witness to the Truth



REPRODUCED AND ADAPTED

A. S. F. R. M. O.

Printed at CREDITON, SEP. 1888.

TO BE SOCIETY

CHRISTIAN V. CHRISTIAN

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

BY JOSHUA TOLBERT, M.A.

Printed at the Christian Press of the Church

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Some Thoughts on the Confession of

David



THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

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## THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

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JOHN xviii. 37.

*To this end I was born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*

OUR Lord giveth us, in these words, an interesting account of the nature and design of his mission. He had been impeached, before the tribunal of the Jewish council, of blasphemy: but, at the bar of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, his enemies change their accusation, and charge him with perverting the nation from their allegiance, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar.

In reply, our Lord, to remove from the mind of the governor every apprehension of danger to the empire of Cæsar from his claims, states the nature of his kingdom. "Jesus answered, "my kingdom is not of this world." Pilate, finding that he did not absolutely disclaim the title of king, said unto him: "Art thou a king, then? Jesus replies, "Thou sayest, that I am a king; to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice:" thus more expressly asserting the spiritual nature of his kingdom, which, in his preceding answer, he had said was *not of this world*.

His errand was not to set up an earthly banner, but to communicate the most important information to mankind; to enlighten the word with knowledge, to convince the judgment by an appeal to reason, and to furnish divine directions for the

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conduct,

conduct. To correct error and to dissipate ignorance, to protest against the corruptions of true religion, and to preach a doctrine opposite to the idolatries, superstitions, and vices of the age was the noble office he was born to sustain and called forth to execute.

The just and exalted view, which our Lord conveyeth in the text, concerning the nature and design of his mission, is correspondent to the language used in other places. The Evangelist, in this respect, contrasts it with that of Moses, and points out its superior excellence: "The law came by Moses, but grace and *truth* by Jesus Christ." Jesus is described as "the *true* light." In an expressive style he calls himself "the light of the world:" and, in words that carry great force in them, declares; "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life." For this reason, in the book of Revelations, he is represented to be "the *true* and faithful witness." Those who approached him with an insidious design, though with outward reverence, accosted him, as one who appeared under the character of the teacher of divine truth. "The pharisees sent unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying; master, we know that thou art *true*, and teachest the way of God in *truth*, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of man." This was a testimony borne by enemies to the tenor of his doctrine, and to the firm, ingenuous, intrepid manner in which he delivered his heavenly instructions, regardless of the praises or frowns of men, and executing with fidelity his commission.

Every sermon he preached, every parable he formed upon rising emergencies, every action of his ministry afforded so many testimonies to his character, as bearing an uniform witness to the truth. His first discourse, on the mount, held up a view of the genuine spirit and principles of his kingdom, opposite to the expectations and notions which the jews had formed concerning it, and repugnant to the corrupt glosses which they had put on the mosaic law. He ever entered a bold and undis-

guised



guised protest against the superstitions of the age and the vice, of those in power. Frank and open was the witness, which he bore to the truth in the synagogues and in the temple, in private circles and before the multitude.

To that witness *we*, now, owe all that light and information on subjects of the most interesting kind which we enjoy. It is the gospel of Christ, that hath enlightened the world with true and divine knowledge. From him have we derived our sublime principles of morality, our exalted conceptions of the Divine Being, our rational and just sentiments of his worship, our notions of the extent and benignity of his providence, our consoling assurances of his mercy and placability, our acquaintance with the compass of his gracious designs for the salvation of mankind, and our clear, well-grounded hope of a resurrection to eternal life.

It is the gospel which hath reformed the wrong judgments of mankind in matters of religion, and hath effectually aided them to detect false principles and to discard foolish practices: substituting in the room of these foolish practices the most substantial and important duties of piety and virtue, and in the place of those false principles the most just and rational sentiments.

From a view of the gospel in all its discoveries and injunctions, and from the consideration of the ministry of Christ, you, christians, have no doubt, that with the strictest propriety he could say; "For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world," or had a commission from heaven, "that I should bear witness unto the truth\*."

From

\* It may be proper to remark here, upon the words of the text, that our Lord speaks of the commencement of his existence, as we do of that of any man; dating it from his birth. "To this end I was born:" what can this signify; but that when this event took place, he was first brought into being? We should certainly so understand the words, if any other person were to say, "when I was born." The language is as plain and explicit a declaration as well can be, that our Lord Jesus was one of the human race,

\* From this design of his ministry he derived an excellence and dignity of character, which commands the respect and reverence of all ages. With the peculiar glory of such a character did he arise and break forth upon a dark and benighted world.

When vice and superstition were dominant through the earth; when even the cultivation of the sciences and the lessons of philosophers left men in uncertainty and doubt on the most important questions, the nature and government of God, and the future destination of their being; when the children of men were "without God and without hope in the world," *then* did he appear, displaying the power and charms of truth, devoting himself to the instruction and illumination of the human race. Artists, philosophers, and prophets retire and disappear before him. The age required a supernatural illumination and called for uncommon virtues, to withstand its corruptions and errors. The doctrine of Christ imparted this illumination: his conduct displayed these virtues.

From this view of the character of Christ and of the design of his mission, a view so honourable and glorious to his name, we learn the great importance of religious truth—we are instructed

and did not belong to any other class of beings. He adds indeed, "for this cause came I into the world;" which has been understood by some to mean his coming "from another," a prior "and a much better abode\*." In this sense, on the supposition of Christ's pre-existence, the clause would be only a repetition of the former declaration in different words, and an useless tautology. Though the phrase may sometimes, as John i. 9. be synonymous to "being born;" yet when applied, throughout the New Testament, to those who supported the character of prophets or messengers of God's will, it must be explained to signify not the beginning of their existence, but of their divine commission: and is of the same import with the phrase, "being sent into the world." So we read, John vi. 14. "Then these men, when they had seen the miracles which Jesus did, said; this is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world:" i. e. who was to have an especial divine commission; the Christ. See Commentaries and Essays, vol. I. p. 391, 397.

\* So the words are paraphrased by Dr. Doddridge.

that

that it is our duty, as his disciples, to seek the truth and to bear our witness to it—and we are encouraged and animated to maintain our attachment to it under all hazards. These are the reflections suggested by what hath been offered on Christ's declaration in the text, and to the consideration of them let our serious attention be directed.

First, the great importance of religious truth, or of just sentiments in religion is, here, an obvious reflection. All truth is pleasing and useful. The discovery of it affects the mind with delight. And it is the guide of conduct. "What Plato," saith a sensible writer, "observes of *virtue* may with equal 'justness be applied to *truth*; that could she be made visible 'to mortal sight, she would excite an inexpressible love and 'admiration of her\*."

In the scriptures, where truth generally means such right principles as relate to religion, the greatest effects are ascribed to it. "By the word of truth" God is said to "beget us to "be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures:" and "through the "belief of the truth" do we obtain that "eternal salvation," which is the great object of the merciful purposes of heaven towards us.

Our Lord Christ Jesus, in particular, had high ideas of its extensive and beneficial influence; as the grand instrument of sanctification and the powerful means of emancipating the human mind from the despotism of prejudice and vice. Exhorting his hearers to "continue in his word," he holds up this inducement, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free:" and offering up his last prayer for his disciples, he prays his father; "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." Nay, his views and labours were directed and governed by a conviction of the valuable tendency of truth. "For their "sakes," he adds, "I sanctify myself, that they also might be "sanctified through the truth."

\* Joseph Nicol Scott's Sermons at the French Church, in Norwich, vol. 1. p. 4.

It is by *enlightening* the minds of men with just notions, that the gospel saves them. It is by *instructing* them in the principles of sound knowledge, that it leads them to virtue and glory. It is true, and it is the honour of the gospel, that its design and influence do not terminate with right speculations. It is a *merciful remedy* for our *fallen* state; and it is a *practical* scheme. But it shows the importance of just sentiments, that the gospel affects these beneficial and saving purposes by the *information* it communicates concerning the nature and counsels of God, and the duty and expectations of mankind.

But the consideration to which the text points, goeth further. While the words strongly express the determined mind, with which the holy Jesus sought to advance the reception and spread of divine truth in the world, they teach us to look upon *this* as the great end, the principal object, which by the providence of God his birth and mission were destined to promote. "For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." Christ was *raised up* to teach and disseminate truth.

The extraordinary character he supported, the active services of his ministry, the miracles which he wrought, the wonders that accompanied his preaching, the sufferings of his cross, his glorious resurrection from the dead, and the power and authority he hath received to rule and govern the human race by his laws and precepts, all the various parts of his undertaking have for their final tendency the advancement of divine knowledge. Every circumstance attending the publication of his gospel, every circumstance reflecting honour on his name serves to heighten our conceptions of the excellence and importance of that sacred truth, of which he was the great minister.

What, indeed, hath been the subject of revelation in any age of the world, but divine truth? What was the design, what the purport of any communications made to the patriarchs, but the communication of right sentiment in religion? Why, was Abraham called? Why, by a series of wonderful providences, were



were his posterity led into Egypt, and afterwards settled in Canaan? Why was Moses invested with the powers of legislation, Aaron with the office of an high-priest, and Joshua with the authority of a leader, but to impart and preserve the knowledge of the true religion? Why, through the successive periods of the Jewish church, did prophets follow prophets, but to give them laws of truth; till, in the fulness of time, appeared Christ Jesus, displaying the glory of the well-beloved of the Father, full of grace and truth, to bear his witness to it, and to die sealing it with his blood.

The counsels of eternity, the revolutions of empires and the fates of the Israelites were only preparatory to the appearance and mission of that great messenger, who was born and sent to give more full, perfect and elevated views of divine truth. These considerations, if any thing can, must leave with us a deep conviction of the value and importance of just sentiments. After pursuing these reflections can it be, any longer a maxim with us, that speculative errors are of little moment? *Of little moment* can they be, when to correct and reform them Moses legislated, the prophets preached and Jesus Christ lived and died? That religious truth, to which the Saviour of mankind bore his living and dying testimony, must deserve the sacred attention of all to whom it hath been communicated. Our zeal for it should rival his. This leads me to observe,

Secondly, That it is our duty as the disciples of Christ, to "seek the truth and bear witness to it. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." In this instance our subject riseth in weight, and cometh home to every heart. We call Christ, Lord, and justly is he entitled to our reverential regards. But what is the use of these regards? What is the value of the reverence we profess for his name, if his maxims do not govern us; if his example doth not form our conduct? In many instance, we can not imitate him. We can not, as he did, by his extraordinary powers of healing, scatter disease, and impart health and soundness. We can not, as he did, calm the storming sea with a word.

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We can not penetrate into the secret counsels of God, like him, who was "in the bosom of the Father\*," or made acquainted with his will and designs. But those counsels which he revealed, that truth which he received from his Father and taught mankind, we may, we should hold in high esteem, avow with humble boldness and maintain with firmness and vigour. In his devotion, in his humility, in his benevolence we may imitate our divine Master, and so also in his zeal for truth.

In *this* Christ Jesus displayed the excellence of his moral as well as executed the commission of his prophetic character. In bearing witness to those doctrines of truth, which he was sent to preach, did he not glorify his Father, and render the most essential service to mankind? In supporting the character of "the true and faithful witness," did he not discover his ardent regard to human virtue and happiness, his integrity of conduct and fortitude of spirit? Do not these parts of his pattern instruct, admonish and animate, as well as the other excellencies that entered into it? He nobly led the way in the cause of divine truth, giving it all the support it could derive from the fidelity of his preaching and his steadfast adherence to it unto death? At the expence of his ease, his interest, his life he disseminated just principles of religion. Withdrawing from our world he left the sacred cause with us.

We are to maintain, profess and guard the divine principles of truth. The noble confession he made before Pilate is our model and incentive. If the truth be lost, if it be corrupted, it must be

\* The phrase, "in the bosom of the Father," is evidently figurative, or spoken after the manner of men. It alluded to the custom of the age, when they used the reclining posture at their entertainments, resting upon the left elbow, and two or three lying on the same couch; so that the head of the second leaned on the bosom of the first in order. This place was reckoned a situation, which marked the estimation and intimacy the former enjoyed with the latter. And the phrase "to be in one's bosom" came to denote an entire and tender affection, a communication of counsels and designs. It is transferred into our language, with a little variation, conveying the same ideas under the term, bosom-friend.

owing to the remissness or the design of those to whom it hath been imparted. How unworthily do they act! How contrary to the principles and maxims by which Christ was governed.— How repugnant are their spirit and conduct, to the spirit he displayed and the conduct he pursued! What blame and guilt lie upon our heads!

Religious truth may have no charms for the avaricious and the sensual: it may carry no weight with the gay and giddy, who never think at all. But the *obligations*, under which all to whom it hath been made known, lie to profess and support it, can not be annulled: and can not be neglected without leaving them criminal. For the excellence of truth, the authority of Christ and the force of his example, with united voice, call upon us to watch the sacred deposit, to “fight the good fight of faith,” to stand fast in those just sentiments with which we have been enlightened, and to “keep the commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

On these principles it is evidently *one end* for which *we* were born, *one cause* for which we were, by the divine providence, brought acquainted with Jesus Christ and his heavenly principles of knowledge, that *we* “should bear witness to the truth.” It is our wisdom and our duty, in this view, to be Christians on a *conviction* of the divinity of the gospel, and with an *understanding well informed* of its principles: without this our testimony to it can not be a rational, or a judicious act.

It is a powerful inducement to do justice to God’s truth, that we shall thus render a service to the world similar to what Christ Jesus rendered to it. “A just representation of the doctrine of Christ would cut down all spiritual tyranny, put an end to all fierce contentions, dispel the groveling, debasing sentiments of superstition, introduce universal harmony and love, and greatly promote true piety and substantial virtue\*.”

For

\* “The Sovereignty of the Divine Administration vindicated,” by Mr. Thomas Dixon of Bolton; Preface p. 7. This was written by Mr. John Seddon,

For religious truth possesseth a peculiar energy to form a moral character, to meliorate the human race in this world, and to train up the individuals who yield to its power for eternal perfection and happiness.

It is a further inducement to engage you herein to follow Christ, "the way and the truth," that by engaging in the like holy and divine attachment with him, *your* character, as *his*, will be improved and perfected by the upright, courageous and zealous attention you give to the cause of religious truth.

It will call forth "not one or two, but many virtues. It requires, in *the first place*, a principle of integrity and impartiality; it calls for much self-denial and humility; it obliges us to subdue and keep under our own prejudices and infirmities; and to practise much lenity and forbearance towards those of others. Why should I overlook that generous disregard of human authority? Or, as generous a contempt of worldly repose and reputation? Not to say worldly advantage and preferment? Things which we find too often engaged on the side of error; and, indeed, whosoever employs himself to a close and serious search after truth," and professes it with sincerity and openness, "must set aside all worldly considerations of whatever kind: as knowing how strong a bias these things may give to his will, and (through that) to his judgment. Above all must the witness of the truth act under a firm belief and veneration of the GOD OF TRUTH; preferring his single approbation to that of the whole world; and crowning his own pious endeavours with most ardent prayers for his direction and assistance." I observe,

Thirdly, that our attachment to the cause of truth must shew itself at all hazards. Our Lord, sending forth his apostles on

Seddon, of Manchester. This excellent man some short time before his death, which happened between 20 and 30 years ago, delivered from the pulpit several discourses on "the Scriptural Idea of Christ," which excited much notice. At last, according to the author's intention, they are printed, and will be soon published, in a cheap form, with a set of useful and awakening sermons on "Self-deception."

\* Joseph Nicol Scott's Sermons, v. i. p. 9, 16.

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their divine errand, giveth them this admonition : " Be ye wise as serpents ; but as harmless as doves." But though prudence should be combined with integrity and zeal, caution is required, that it doth not degenerate into timidity : and that, to avoid probable evil, present duty be not neglected.

Truth hath been, in most ages and most countries, unpopular : and the open profession of it, frequently, dangerous. The fearless advocate for it hath the errors, the prejudices and the vices of mankind against him. The first preachers of christianity were condemned, as men who " turned the world upside down." Paul was charged with *heresy*. Jesus Christ was regarded as an *innovator*, and represented as one who intended to destroy the law and the prophets. He foresaw the occasion which his religion would give to animosities, hatred, and persecutions : and in the prospect of the evils which would arise from the promulgation of the gospel, he said ; " I came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword."

The evils to which the pure profession of the truth would expose his followers, fell first on himself. The uniform, intrepid witness he bore to the truth drew on him a series of painful sufferings. Yet, in the prospect of an approaching death, in the very moment of distress he maintained his attachment to the cause which he was sent into the world to advance. At the tribunal of his judge, in the presence of his enemies, prosecuting their indignant designs against him, at the evident risk of his life, he openly and firmly avows the end of his mission : " for this end was I born, for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."

From his example we learn, that the love of truth must not only dwell in the breast, but be paramount to every other consideration. To *that* ease, fortune, reputation, and even life itself, must be sacrificed. With what force doth this argument apply to those timid, cautious christians, who are afraid of discussion, lest it should disturb the peace of the world ; who are averse to the publication of unpopular opinions, lest they should unhinge the

minds of the weak, and excite the resentment of the prejudiced.

If such apprehensions are to weigh for the suppression of truth, the world must ever remain in ignorance and error. If they had weighed with our Luthers, our Calvins and our Socinuses, the reformation from popery had not taken place; spiritual tyranny had to this day enslaved men, and the night of darkness had still prevailed. If such apprehensions had weighed in the judgment of Jesus, or in the counsels of heaven, christianity had never renovated the world: but superstition and idolatry had to this day covered the earth. Not consequences should govern us; but the *obligation of duty*. The discharge of duty may be attended with temporary and local evils: but the benefits arising from it will be, in the end, extensive and permanent.

Things being so, may we not justly lament the lukewarmness and indifference of those, who are not only unwilling to forego any advantages for the sake of truth, but will not be at any pains to discover it; though when it is found, the profession of it will cost them almost nothing. Speculative opinions are held in little, or no estimation. The preacher, if he attempt to discuss any disputed doctrine, is heard with listlessness, if not disgust. The treatise that would assist us to form and to settle our religious notions, because it bears on it the face of controversy, is thrown by with an angry neglect. The sacred scriptures themselves, it may be feared, are not carefully studied as the rule of truth and to adjust *by them* men's ideas on the doctrines they contain. So indifferent are many to the rectitude of their religious profession and the justness of their sentiments, they feel no reluctance habitually to join in worship conducted upon a plan, which in their own opinion is exceptionable, nay erroneous and unscriptural.

Far be it from me to defend the bitterness and rancour, with which religious controversy hath been generally conducted: but I must be an advocate for a candid and free discussion, as the only way of detecting error and of attaining just and rational knowledge.

knowledge. Far be it from me to set speculation in opposition to practice : but its importance both in itself, and as the basis of practice should be strongly urged. Nay, it is as really a duty to *know* and to gain an acquaintance with the mind and will of God, as when it is known, to *do* it.

“ The performance of *one* duty will be no atonement for the violation of *another*. No religious services can be acceptable to God, which are not the spontaneous fruits of a rational conviction. And how absurd is it to pronounce *any* truth whatsoever to be unimportant, especially, when we cannot discern its various dependencies, or foresee the great consequences, which may follow from it. But it is highly culpable to affirm, that the truths of the *gospel* are insignificant to *christians*. No : they are all related in some respect to a virtuous and honourable conduct\*.”

Should any, impressed with the force of these considerations, ask, by what means shall we bear our witness to the truth ? The reply is not difficult. First, endeavour to know the truth. Give full scope to an inquisitive mind. Start not back with dread from the proposal of sentiments, that may militate against former notions, or popular doctrines. Receive what is offered with meekness. Hear with calmness. Study the argument : examine the scriptures ; and candidly follow conviction, as by serious and fair discussion, it is produced in the mind. Having found the truth, openly avow it, and with firmness profess it. To be ashamed of it is cowardly ; to conceal it is hypocritical. The conscientious acknowledgment of it is our testimony to its excellence : and will awaken the attention of others to it. Having ourselves felt its power and worth, can we be indifferent and unconcerned about its reception in the world, that it may enlighten and rejoice others ?

Let free-enquiry be encouraged. Let every opportunity of communicating instruction be improved. Let every means of diffusing knowledge be adopted : and every scheme, that hath

\* Wakefield's Enquiry into the Opinions of the Christian Writers. The Address, p. 30, 31.

for its object the leading men into just views of the truth of God, be countenanced.

On these grounds is formed that association of christians, whom I have, now, the honour of addressing. Our views and principles have been already stated from the press: so that there is less reason for a full explanation of them in this place.

We are very sensible, that many of our fellow-christians, whose characters we respect and to whose friendship we are by no means indifferent, cannot sanction our sentiments with their approbation. But even to *their* candour, to *their* love of truth we are willing to refer the propriety of the steps we take to advance the knowledge and spread of those opinions, which to us appear to be divinely true.

The avowal of our religious tenets, we assure ourselves, will, so far from incurring their censure, secure their applause; as a commendable instance of fair, sincere and ingenuous conduct. Neither can they justly be displeased with us, that by forming ourselves into a society, we aim to give a notoriety and weight to the declaration of our sentiments, which the testimony of single and detached individuals can not carry with it: or that we thus assist each others' efforts and animate each others' zeal, in the cause which lieth near to our hearts. In this we only exercise an undoubted right, and follow the dictates of duty and of our social nature.

Though the views of the christian religion which we embrace on conviction and earnestly wish to propogate, appear to many of our christian brethren erroneous, and repugnant to some notions which they have ever regarded as not only true, but most essentially important: yet on what solid reason can they censure our measures, or fear their operation? Our design is to promote enquiry and discussion. Our wish and aim is to obtain, for our sentiments, a candid examination and fair hearing\*.

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\* I would subjoin here, as very pertinent, a passage from an excellent sermon of Dr. Lowth, the late bishop of London. "Let no one," says his lordship,



The idea we have of the divine unity hath been, according to our judgment, "a long lost truth:" and the opinions we avow have, for ages, laboured under every discouragement from ignorance, prejudice and authority. Of late years they have, indeed, been brought out to view; fully and clearly stated, and very ably argued. But still the acquaintance that men have with them is confined and partial. As the spirit of attention is awakened, we feel it a *duty* to encourage and spread it.

With this view are we induced to make an open and united avowal of our belief, and to distribute books, that may disseminate the knowledge of it, and of the reasons on which it is founded. We feel the force of that example, which many liberal-minded christians, in the metropolis, have set us: and we promise ourselves, that the force of it, to which we have yielded, will act with energy through other remote parts of the kingdom.

The candid exhibition of the reasons of our faith ought not to offend, or alarm any. If our reasons be not just and conclusive, though a few may, for a time, be led away by them, the "counsel must finally come to nought:" and that truth, which we are considered as opposing, must in the end prevail; and, through the examination which our measures are intended to promote and assist, will stand upon a firmer basis, and shine forth with clearer evidence. So that we shall, eventually,

lordship, "lightly entertain suspicions of any serious proposal for the advancement of religious knowledge; nor, out of unreasonable prejudice, endeavour to obstruct any enquiry, that professes to aim at the further illustration of the great scheme of the gospel in general, or the removal of error in any part, in faith, in doctrine, in practice, or in worship. An opinion is not therefore false, because it contradicts received notions: but, whether true or false, let it be submitted to a fair examination; truth must in the end be a gainer by it, and appear with the greater evidence. Where freedom of enquiry is maintained and exercised under the divine direction of the sincere word of God, falsehood may perhaps triumph for a day; but to-morrow truth will certainly prevail, and every succeeding day will confirm her superiority." Lowth's Visitation Sermon at Durham, July 27, 1758. 2d. edit. p. 22, 23.

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render the most important service to the cause against which we may appear to direct our attempts. In the issue TRUTH must prevail. And, I trust, that there is not one of us, but will rejoice in the prevalence of TRUTH, whether it should, finally, be found with ourselves, or others.

All we want at present, I would repeat it, is to have *an bearing*: which hath been, in a manner denied to the principles we espouse; while, by censures and an odium cast on them and by *penal laws*, every thing hath been done to suppress them. Books on the other side abound; are in all hands and in daily reading. They have prepossessed the minds of many with prejudices against our views of the christian religion: they are perused with unsuspecting confidence in the truth of the representations they give of christianity: and thus instead of promoting enquiry, they *foster credulity*. The general current of religious reading is in fact against what we conceive to be the true knowledge of the unity of God, and the scriptural idea of the character of his Christ.

There are, it is allowed, a great variety and number of tracts favourable to these sentiments: but the circulation of them is by no means general and extensive. They are not popular; and many, by their situation in life, are precluded an access to them. It is therefore, in our opinion, an object of great importance, by the distribution of such books, to promote the reading of them, and to disseminate what appear to us the purest views of the doctrine of revelation. We wish to *inform* and *enlighten* men. On those subjects, in which God himself hath condescended, by revelation, to instruct us, and with respect to which Jesus Christ hath risen up the light of the world, doth piety, doth benevolence, doth the love of sacred truth, prompt our wishes and animate our endeavours to inform and enlighten men.

Let it be also, observed, that the design of the society into which we have entered, is not merely to give others just and accurate notions on some speculative points of controversy, but to convey  
*practical*

*practical* sentiments into their hearts. The better instructed men are; the better, more virtuous and worthy characters will they become. We are persuaded, that there is a close connection between a sound judgment and a good life. The knowledge we disseminate is *religious* knowledge; the knowledge of God and of his will. The *Unitarian* Creed doth not undermine the authority of Christ: but placeth it on a just and solid basis, his mission from God. Its leading principle impresseth the heart with a conviction of the SUPREMACY of the ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL, as a SUPREMACY in WISDOM and BENEVOLENCE as well as in POWER.

The purest views of christianity, we are convinced, must be favourable to christian practice: for they will cut off the false hopes of men, and detach them from superstitious practices, which have been always the substitutes for real goodness and virtue. When genuine christianity can work with its own full and native force upon the mind, can it be otherwise than expected that it will work most effectually? We appeal to the judgment of our brethren, who may differ from us, whether we can possibly call the thoughts of men to the subjects of divine knowledge and truth, without at the same time directing their attention to the most important, *practical* principles: whether, if we can possess any with the love of God's *truth*, we shall not at the same time, infuse into them the love of *virtue*?

But, independently of our endeavours to disseminate just views of the christian religion, it will be a great object of this society to distribute books, that are merely *devotional* and *practical*: only clear of these notions which, in our opinion, fully the glory, corrupt the doctrines and enervate the influence of the gospel\*. In the selection we shall make of pieces for distri-

\* It is the remark of an excellent writer, to whom the lovers of sacred literature owe the tribute of respect and gratitude, that "christianity can never have its free course amongst rational creatures in general, while gross misrepresentations of it are substituted in the place of the simple and perfect original." Bishop Newton's *Observations on the Conduct and Ministry of Christ*; Preface p. 9.

oution, great regard will be paid to the tendency and fitness of them to animate devotion, enlarge benevolence, and strengthen every sentiment of virtue in the mind.

In this respect the design of our association is highly useful : a design, which must be dear to every one who wishes well to the cause of righteousness. We cannot reflect upon our design, in any view of it, without the approbation of our own minds. And, though we are not so sanguine as to promise ourselves, that it will, in every instance, be successful, we can not but devoutly rejoice in the prospect of its usefulness.

Let measures that have in view this end, *the discovery and spread of divine truth*, be pursued ; good will be done. Religion and virtue will be promoted. A spirit of candour and liberality will keep pace with a spirit of enquiry. And a more happy, an improving state of things, with respect to knowledge, liberty and truth, will be brought on. To our own minds, on the retrospect of human life and of all the scenes that have raised our passions and interested our hearts, it will afford the best ground of solid comfort ; that we have borne our witness to God's truth, and done our best to leave mankind the wiser for our having lived amongst them. Nothing is trivial, nothing is unimportant, that tends to this end : and be it ever remembered, most important, most conducive to this end is that *divine truth*, to which you are called to bear witness.

To conclude, high is the dignity of TRUTH ; and inestimable its value. It enlightens the world. It subdues prejudices. It conquers vice. It emancipates the human mind. It breaks the chains of despotism and establishes liberty. It opens the springs of consolation and advanceth human happiness. " TRUTH  
" elevates and strengthens the mind. It is this, which forms  
" men to the love and practice of virtue, which speaks comfort  
" to the heart under the sorrows of life, which banisheth the fear  
" of death, and which exalts man to IMMORTAL FELICITY\*."

\* See Mr. Belsham's sermon on the " Importance of Truth," p. 36. To which admirable discourse the reader is referred for a rich variety and compass of sentiments on this point, delivered with peculiar animation and pathos.



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## A P P E N D I X.

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DEUT. xxxi. 22, 23.

*Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel. And he gave Joshua, the son of Nun, a charge, and said; Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee.*

IN a sermon lately published\*, to illustrate and ascertain the meaning of Christ's promise, Matt. xviii. 20. I quoted the above passage. It was observed, that Moses here delivering his last, dying exhortation engages to be with Joshua, his successor: not that he himself, after his death could be personally present with the future leader of the Israelites; but that the same divine power which had supported and sanctioned *his* ministry, would bear witness to that of Joshua. As some respected friends have expressed themselves much dissatisfied with the turn given to the passage, I would embrace this opportunity to justify my explanation of it.

Their opinion is, that the pronoun, *be*, does not apply to Moses, as its antecedent, but to the LORD, or Jehovah, v. 16. and that the 22d verse should be thrown into a parenthesis. For the words are not compatible, they urge, with the character of Moses; and v. 14. he was directed to call Joshua, that the Lord might give him a charge. Bishop Patrick and Mr. Orton have been quoted to me, as agreeing with them in the interpretation of the passage. Our translation has, probably, led them to refer the pronoun *be*, to a so remote antecedent; for occurring here, and not in the preceding clause, after the

\* Preached at the Opening of Bridwell Chapel, near Uffculme.

conjunctive particle, it appears to carry an emphasis with it: but this is not the case in the original, where the verb in each clause has equally the prefix of the third person, though our version has preserved it in the latter but not the former; when it would have been more accurate to have omitted or to have preserved it in each. The adopting a parenthesis, to detach the 22d from the 23d verse, is evidently arbitrary: and it is done to avoid the force of the strict, grammatical construction of the passage, which connects by the intervening conjunctions all the three sentences with Moses, as the nominative case to each.—This construction is in analogy with the whole chapter; throughout which the agent or speaker is not changed without an express declaration of it: see verses, 7, 14, 16, 22. This analogy requires, that had the charge to Joshua been delivered immediately by the Lord, it should have been explicitly notified; when the subject to the two preceding verbs was Moses.

The LXX understood all the verbs as predicated of him: “but fearing” observes Mr. Lindsey “left the prophetic dialect should be mistaken by foreigners, have rendered the concluding part *την ωμωσεν αυτοις Κυριος και αυτος εσται μετα σου*. i. e. The Lord swore unto them and he shall be with thee.”

But this was a superfluous caution, and with the difficulty my friends feel on the head, proceeds from not allowing for the nature of the prophetic dialect or scripture idiom. “For,” as the above valuable writer remarks\*, “it is not unusual with the prophets to drop their own person, and assume that of the Supreme Being whom they represent, without any notice given of the change.” There are various instances of this in the speeches of Moses. Thus Deut. xi. 13, 14, 15, he says of himself. “And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto my commandments, which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, that *I will give you the rain* of your land in his due season—*I will send grass* in thy fields.” In stronger language chap. xxix. 5, 6. “I have

\* Lindsey's Two Dissertions, p. 77, 78, and Sequel to the Apology, p. 371.

“ led you forty years in the wilderness : your clothes are not  
 “ waxed old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy  
 “ foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drank strong  
 “ drink ; that he might know, that *I am the Lord your God.*”  
 And in a strict correspondence with the strain of the verse under  
 our consideration, we afterwards find Caleb representing Moses  
 as having sworn to give the land of Canaan. Joshua xiv. 9.

These passages are sufficient to remove the reluctance some  
 may feel to admit, that Moses, is, in the passage before us,  
 the person who promises to be with Joshua : though not in *his*  
*own* name, but as the voice or mouth of God : or, as Mr. Samuel  
 Clarke, a judicious commentator of the last century, glosses the  
 words, “ repeating to Joshua what God had spoken.” This au-  
 thor felt no difficulty in allowing, that Moses was the speaker  
 here. For, in his Analytical survey of the Bible, he observes  
 that the command to write a song as a witness against the  
 Israelites is amplified by (1.) Moses’ execution of this command,  
 v. 22. (2.) *His* charge to Joshua, v. 23.

If, after all, these elucidations should be unsatisfactory, the  
 explanation of Christ’s words in Matt. xviii. 20. is no further  
 affected by it, that *one proof* of it fails. It remains supported  
 by the other remarks that were offered to establish it, particularly  
 by the reference to John, xiv. 18. compared with the 16th verse.  
 I will here add, in favour of it, another instance of our Lord’s  
 speaking in the character of his Father, without giving express  
 notice of it. Matt. xxiii. 34. “ Wherefore behold, I send  
 “ unto you prophets and wise men and scribes :” which Luke  
 interprets as spoken in the name of God chap. xi. 49.—  
 “ Therefore also *said the wisdom of God*, I will send prophets  
 “ and apostles.”

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